DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 418 957 SP 037 923

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TITLE Teaching on the Internet. Meeting the Challenges of Electronic Learning.
PUB DATE 1997-10-01
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Fall Conference of the Arkansas Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (October 1-2, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Computer Assisted Instruction; *Computer Uses in Education; Educational Technology; Higher Education; *Internet; Microcomputers; *Preservice Teacher Education; Student Teachers; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS University of Arkansas Little Rock

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the University of Arkansas at Little Rock used Internet resources in an introductory education course, American Education. During the spring semester of 1996 and 1997, educators taught the course both via the Internet and in classrooms. Teaching materials were located on the university's website. The only difference between the online course and the classroom course was the medium of information transmission. Course objectives and assignments were identical. For the online course, students read text and lectures online and participated in listserv discussions. They took examinations in the computer lab and completed online assignments. Students also had to find sites to visit via online contacts and interview classroom teachers. Students had to serve at least 14 hours at the university's neighborhood homework center located near campus, which helps inner city elementary students with their homework. Benefits observed from the online course included higher student motivation, exposure to extended resources, and improved quality of discussion and written assignments. Drawbacks included lack of technical support and extra time required of teachers and students. Students in the online course did equally well to students in the classroom course on four examinations. A list of resources for Web teachers and a list of other resources are included. (SM)

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ED 418 957

Teaching on the Internet

(Meeting the Challenges of Electronic Learning)

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Presented to

Arkansas Association of Colleges of Teacher Education
Fall Conference
October 1-2, 1997

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Teaching on the Internet

(*Meeting the Challenges of Electronic Learning*)

Oh what a tangled Web the World Wide Web has become. Information available via the Internet, some have estimated, doubles every four months. During September, 1997, alone, more than one hundred new *educational* web sites became active on the Web. As a resource for teaching and learning, the World Wide Web presents many challenges for teachers who want to use the resources of the Internet in teaching and learning.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how these challenges were addressed through an introductory education course at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). The course, American Education, EDFN 2300, was taught using the Internet during the spring semester, 1996 and 1997. Teaching materials for this course (class roster, syllabus, objectives, assignments, lectures, and links to other resources) were located on UALR's College of Education ONLINE, **http://www.ualr.edu/~coedept/.**

American Education examines the philosophical, sociological, psychological, and historical foundations of American education, especially in the public schools. The course also provides opportunities for each student to develop an official certification/degree plan and to apply for admission to UALR's teacher education program. The ONLY difference between American Education (via the Internet) and American Education (via the Classroom) was the medium of information transmission.

Course objectives for students taking the class over the Internet were identical to those of other, traditional lecture sections offered during the same semester. The objectives include the following:

1. The student will be able to identify and describe the major social, historical, philosophical, and religious factors that had an impact on education and schooling in the colonial period.

2. The student will be able to identify and describe the major social, philosophical, and historical factors which led to the Common School Movement and other 19th century developments in American public education.

3. The student will be able to identify and describe the major social, philosophical, and historical factors which have influenced American public education in the 20th century.

4. The student will be able to identify and describe the major educational philosophies and their influence on American public education.

5. The student will be able to identify and describe the major consequences of immigration and ethnicity on American culture and education.

6. The student will be able to identify and describe the influence of psychology on 20th century American education.

Assignments required and grading procedures for students also were the same as traditional lecture sections.

The following assignments were required:

1. Each student was expected to read the text, the lectures found on the College of Education's WWW space, and participate in listserv discussions.

2. Students took 4 examinations during the semester. Examinations were taken on computers in the Larson Hall Microcomputer Lab.

3. Students located (using the ERIC page on the College of Education's WWW space) and copied ERIC abstracts for two topics. They reported where one could find the information, article, or book that contains this information and emailed information to the listserv.

4. Students also completed reflective and observational assignments and posted them to the class listserv. This assignment served as a beginning of a professional teaching portfolio. These assignments were intended to help students to focus on future career goals in the profession of teaching.

Students were asked to:

a. Type a short autobiographical sketch (1-2 pages) in which they identified the agents of enculturation that have shaped their attitudes and values. In other words, what experiences, institutions, and people had shaped who they are and what they believe in? Autobiographies were posted to the class listserv.

b. Identify a teacher or teachers who have been most effective and made a difference in their lives. Why were they so special? What characteristics made them stand out from other teachers? Effective teacher reports were posted to the class listserv.

c. Examine the new standards for teacher licensure in Arkansas. They located this information on the College of Education's WWW space under "Just for Undergraduate Students" in the licensure category.
Students chose one of the five principles for licensure of beginning teachers and, in their own words, described what behaviors and attitudes that principle encompasses. Licensure reports were posted to the class listserv.

d. Students selected two of the suggested observation sites serving children in the age levels in which they were most interested. Students set up a convenient time to visit the site by calling the listed contact person. They were instructed to find out about the services and programs offered and observe in a classroom. Students interviewed teachers and posted the information to the class listserv.

e. Students interviewed several classroom teachers (at least two from different grade levels) to determine the relationship they see between home and school. How do they bridge the gap and get parents involved? Students record findings on our class listserv.

f. Students developed a personal professional development plan for the coming year that listed several areas of interest and how they intended to go about getting more information or experience about them. Professional development plans were posted to the class listserv.

5. Students were expected to serve for at least 14 hours in UALR's Neighborhood Homework Center located near campus. The program operates on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 2:30-6:00 p.m. Students served as a field trip chaperone, homework helper, snack/recreation helper, computer buddy, or assisted with special events and projects. However, most of their time was devoted to helping children use the computer lab located in the center.

The goal of this assignment was to expose students to 3rd-6th graders from two inner city schools (Bale and Franklin Elementary Schools). Good teachers must be involved with their communities and be able to work well not only with children, but with parents and adults from various backgrounds and cultures. Experiences were recorded and posted to the class listserv.

Benefits of Teaching Via the Internet

The following benefits were observed:

- Motivation--Students seemed to be more motivated to read lectures, complete assignments, and participate in discussions than in traditional, lecture classrooms. Perhaps this was related to the "newness" of the experience, but there was a clear excitement of participating in a new and different way of learning for most students.
- Casual alternative--One student observed that what he liked best was that he "did not have to dress for class." During each semester, student postings to the class listserv were monitored for date and time of posting. Students participate in listserv activities during every day of the week and virtually every hour of the day. Electronic learning allowed students to participate in discussions and complete assignments at times convenient to them.
- Exposure to extended resources--Through hyper-links to related resources throughout the World Wide Web, students were able to tap into an almost endless array of related educational resources.
- Improved quality in discussion and written assignments--Student participation in class discussions and written assignments was far more deliberative than typically found in a classroom discussion. Ideas and beliefs had to be thought out in advance and committed to writing before presentation to the entire class.

Drawbacks of Teaching Via the Internet

The following drawbacks were observed:

- Lack of technical support--Students had access to a wide variety of hardware and software necessary to access class materials. Technical support was not present to help students configure these tools and trouble-shoot problems.
- Time--Teaching via the Internet requires more time of both teacher and students. Responding in writing to each student's assignment is time consuming. Initial preparation of course materials also demands a large investment of time.

- Focus on process, not content--Most students who completed American Education via the Internet would no doubt report that the course was about learning to use the Internet rather than about the philosophical, sociological, psychological, and historical foundations of American education.

Findings and Conclusions

Students who completed American Education via the Internet did equally well to students in traditional classrooms on four standard course examinations. Electronic alternative to traditional classrooms, however, are not for all students and not for all teachers. For those comfortable with the medium, electronic learning provides greater flexibility in completing course requirements.

Resources for Web Teachers

http://www.utexas.edu/world/lecture/
The World Lecture Hall

This page contains links to pages created by faculty worldwide who are using the Web to deliver class materials. For example, you will find course syllabi, assignments, lecture notes, exams, class calendars, multimedia textbooks, etc.

http://www.ils.nwu.edu/~e_for_e/nodes/I-M-INTRO-ZOOMER-pg.html
Engines for Education

For those who are interested in the educational system; its problems, possible solutions, and how advances in computer technology can provide new opportunities in teachning and learning.

http://www.cnet.com/Central/News/index.html
C/Net Central News

clnet is an integrated information source devoted to computers, multimedia, online services, and the ongoing digital revolution.

http://www.21CT.org/
21st Century Teachers

A joint undertaking by several LEADING EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS to encourage, recognize, and support educators who are developing skills in new technologies and using them in innovative ways with students and colleagues. This initiative is in support of the "teacher development" pillar of President Clinton's Educational Technology Initiative.

http://www.access.digex.net/~nsbamags/e-school.html
The Electronic School

A publication for K-12 school leaders and educators who are striving to enhance student learning through the judicious and appropriate use of technology.

http://www.ee.surrey.ac.uk/Contrib/Edupage/current.html
EDUPAGE

EDUCOM publication

http://www.nctp.com/
The National Center for Technology Planning

This site contains articles and research compiled by leading educators on incorporating technology into schools in a workable fashion.

http://fromnowon.org/
From Now On: The Educational Technology Journal

An electronic educational journal devoted to technology-related issues, including the Internet, technology planning, and professional development programs.

http://www.teachers.net/lessons/
Teachers.Net Lesson Exchange

This custom resource is streamlined to provide teachers fast access to a large storehouse of lesson plans and ideas, including easy on-line browsing of posted lessons, a powerful search engine, and a faster submission form.

Other Resources

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